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Local governments, state emergency planners meet to plan for disasters

Officials say advanced planning critical to preparedness

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More than 50 representatives from municipal, county and state governments gathered in Georgetown today to better prepare themselves for future disasters, hoping that coordinating now will help them avoid the emergency response missteps that unfolded in other communities last year.

Leaders from more than a dozen Sussex County towns, five school districts, four nursing care facilities and three area hospitals joined Sussex County officials and members of the Delaware Emergency Management Agency for a morning of presentations and discussions about the issues that might face the region in a disaster.

Emergency officials said the meeting – the second hosted by the county in the past two years – is a good way for town and school district officials, in particular, to gain insights from county and state emergency planners.

“We’re talking about all kinds of issues, from the lessons learned from recent disasters, like Hurricane Katrina, and how best to plan, to how to evacuate and shelter people. We’re also talking about recent changes to the building code,” said Joseph Thomas, director of the Sussex County Emergency Operations Center.

“These are items local governments and emergency planners need to discuss now, rather than later, when it might be too late,” Thomas said.

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Thomas said he intends to make this an annual gathering, so local and state officials are always in step with one another when it comes to disaster planning.

“It’s an opportunity to bring all the local representatives together to discuss any issues they might have, and help us get a better feel of what those are and how we can assist them,” Thomas said.

Jamie Turner, director of DEMA, echoed Thomas’ comments.

“I appreciate the opportunity to come and share our information along with the county, the municipalities and organizations that are present here today,” Turner said. “It’s extremely important that we keep them abreast of our planning, our response and our recovery activities.”

Keeping all the levels of government informed, and coordinating before, during and after a storm, is critical to meeting the needs of the public in a time of crisis, Thomas said.

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD CONTACT EOC SPOKESWOMAN DEBBIE JONES OR DIRECTOR JOSEPH THOMAS AT (302) 855-7801.